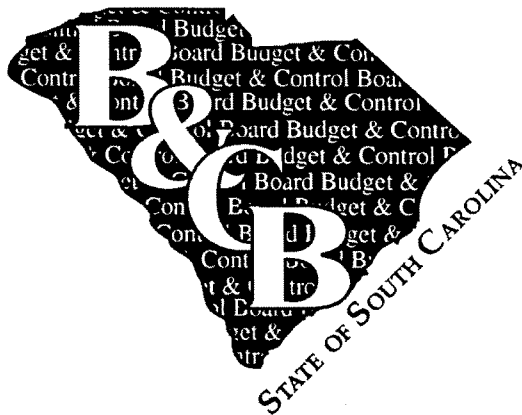


**May 3, 2003**

# State Government News Summary



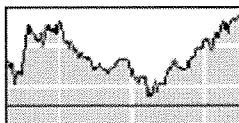
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Posted on Sat, May. 03,  
2003

THE SUN NEWS

## Sanford tells Strand to stay true to tourism

Governor: Future of area bright

By Issac J. Bailey  
The Sun News

The Grand Strand must be unified, utilize its wealth of intellectual capital and remain true to its core industry even as it strives for economic diversity, S.C. Gov. Mark Sanford said Friday at the second annual Growth Summit.

The Grand Strand's core is its strength as a tourism destination, he said, saying "I think you've got to continue to play to that."

The Grand Strand has thrived in the past despite a lack of infrastructure and being "outgunned" at the legislative level by regions with larger populations and representation, he said.

Local leaders and residents face challenges, but there's little question the area has a bright future.

"The prospects are great," Sanford said.

Local residents and leaders have recognized this area's primary natural resource - the beach - is its key to growth. An



By Randall Hill / The Sun News

S.C. Gov. Mark Sanford gives the keynote address at the 2003 Growth Summit at Coastal Carolina University.

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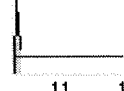
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entrepreneurial spirit persuaded residents to use that resource to fuel the local economy, he said.

The Grand Strand grew as a result, often faster than most other areas around the country. Horry and Georgetown counties saw a 33 percent increase in population during the 1990s, compared with 13 percent for the nation as a whole and 19.5 percent for the S.C. coast. The local growth rate was even faster for relocating retirees ages 65 and older.

Horry and Georgetown counties saw that age group grow 56.4 percent in the 1990s, compared with about 22.6 percent for all of South Carolina.

"I think the future is bright when it comes to growth on the Grand Strand. Period and exclamation point," Sanford said.

The growth is a given, but there are potential pitfalls. The push for increased economic diversity might be a good idea, but going too far and altering the Grand Strand's image could get in the way of future growth, Sanford said.

Greenville County has about three times as many high-paying manufacturing jobs as the Grand Strand.

But local leaders shouldn't necessarily try to match Greenville or similar counties, Sanford said.

"Be careful not to lose your brand identity as you diversify," he said, saying the most successful companies in America consistently present clear messages.

"Be careful about sending conflicting signals," he said. "You may or may not like McDonald's, but you know what it's about."

Rapid growth has led to new opportunities the Grand Strand could explore, Sanford said.

The growth of the older population, for example, gives the Grand Strand experience and knowledge other areas don't have, Sanford said.

Many of the people moving here are well-educated and aren't bringing a large number of children, which gives local leaders the chance to be creative with educational funding, he said, saying utilizing the intellectual capital those residents bring must be a priority.

"These people have expertise," Sanford said. "If all these people came to do is play golf, this area will be the worst for it."

Sanford said building community must be a priority and said it can

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be done with neighborhood schools and neo-traditional developments that encourage interaction between residents.

Changes in the state's income-tax system, a restructuring of state government and direct interstate access also will clear the way for future growth along the Grand Strand, he said.

A modified tax structure, which would include an increased cigarette tax but lower taxes overall, would give more people incentive to take risks, Sanford said, pointing out that risk takers are a big reason the area has thrived in the past.

But the completion of the long-awaited I-73 doesn't yet have a deadline or the necessary funding. Lack of interstate access has made it more difficult for the Grand Strand to attract major manufacturers.

"It becomes clearer and clearer that [I-73] is crucial to this area to sustain growth," Sanford said.

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Contact ISSAC J. BAILEY at 626-0357 or [ibailey@thesunnews.com](mailto:ibailey@thesunnews.com).



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Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

## Coastal panel wants to meet with Sanford

By BRUCE SMITH  
The Associated Press

**North Charleston** The Council on Coastal Futures wants a meeting with Gov. Mark Sanford after some members complained Friday their work is being undermined.

"I think it's all communications," said Wes Jones, chairman of the council appointed by the Department of Health and Environmental Control board in the waning days of Gov. Jim Hodges' administration.

Jones said a meeting would be "just to make sure everybody understands what everybody else is doing and the efforts being made to try to provide some clarity on some of these coastal zone issues."

The panel, composed of environmentalists, businesspeople, scientists, lawmakers and public officials, is reviewing regulations after 25 years of coastal management in the state.

"The governor would be happy to sit down and hear their thoughts on these regulations," said Will Folks, a spokesman for Sanford. "He's open to exploring any idea that's going to balance economic development interests with the need to maintain quality of life."

Some council members complained about a separate meeting set for later this month including attorneys, DHEC officials, environmentalists and others to discuss a bill introduced recently in the Senate.

If approved, permits issued by DHEC's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management would no longer automatically be stayed when someone files notice of appeal. The Council on Coastal Futures has wrestled with the issue, but has not yet made a final recommendation.

"If we're going to have these splinter groups go off and do things, why do we need to meet here every month?" Bluffton Mayor Hank Johnston asked.

The planned meeting was "to get together a group of parties who are interested in that issue to hammer out the details of what might be consensus," said Elizabeth Hagood, chairwoman of the DHEC board. She is not a member of the Coastal Futures council, but she attended Friday's meeting.

She helped lead a Quality of Life Task Force for Sanford after last fall's election.

"We had been in conversation with the governor's office -- members of the task force -- about putting together legislation that did have consensus," she said. "We had success before just sitting around a table working out the issues, and this was a continuation of that."

"Do you understand that when the chairman of DHEC and the board chairman of DHEC are on this committee, it basically undermines our work?" asked state Rep. Dwight Loftus, R-Greenville, who is on the Coastal Futures panel.

"It certainly had no intent of undermining anything Coastal Futures is doing," said Hagood, who added the information would be presented to the council later.

But council member Mike Wooten, of Myrtle Beach, said the separate meeting "totally undermines what this group should be doing in a public format."

State Sen. John Kuhn, R-Charleston, another council member, said there is little chance legislators will approve the bill this year. The council is expected to consider the permit issue next month.

Jimmy Chandler, an attorney whose clients include the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League and the Sierra Club, was invited to the separate meeting.

"If I can't represent my clients, go to meetings and go about my job, then perhaps it's time for me to resign from the Council on Coastal Futures," he said. "I want to make sure that being on the Council on Coastal Futures, I am not giving up my ability to represent my clients."

Because it is unlikely the bill will be passed this session, "we think it is appropriate to look at this issue in a little more detail before weighing in," Folks said.

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Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

## Summit may lead to joining of forces

By Dawn Bryant  
The Sun News

**CONWAY** - Grand Strand leaders are considering forming an ad hoc committee to help guide the area's booming growth and the effect it has on issues such as transportation, education and quality of life.

The idea, similar to one leaders unsuccessfully pushed a decade ago, surfaced Friday during the second annual Growth Summit, sponsored by Coastal Carolina University and The Sun News. Nearly 300 area leaders packed the auditorium at CCU's Wall College of Business to see an economic snapshot of the area's employment and population trends and to hear S.C. Gov. Mark Sanford, who was the summit's keynote speaker.

After digesting the statistics that show the area needs to prepare for an influx of baby boomers, Rep. Tracy Edge, R- North Myrtle Beach, one of the six panelists, suggested creating a metropolitan planning commission with two members from each municipality.

That group would be charged with managing growth, opening communication lines across geographical and political boundaries and planning for the next 10 to 20 years, Edge said.

It's similar to a group leaders tried to form in 1993, as urged by the Grass Roots Initiative for Planning and Progress, or GRIPP.

The idea didn't take off because leaders guarded their jurisdictions.

"I think it is time we do GRIPP No. 2," Edge said. "It is very important that these governmental bodies communicate with each other."

At last year's Growth Summit, leaders talked about the need to start taking a regional approach to tackle issues that cross geographic lines, including transportation. Some leaders say the Grand Strand is ready to work together, as the communities have grown together.

"The timing now is right to be looking at more cooperation between agencies and possible consolidation of services," said Horry County Administrator Danny Knight, who was part of GRIPP in the 1990s.

CCU plans to be the agency that works with Edge to bring the different communities together, said Dave DeCenzo, dean of CCU's Wall College of Business Administration.

"Any action that will bring people together to talk about common issues is good," he said. "It is well worth pursuing."

Having a united approach would help the Grand Strand weather the growth challenges of the coming years, experts say. Statistics show the rapidly growing population will be fueled by an influx of baby boomers, who are reaching retirement age and are lured to the coast by its affordability and amenities.

The area should try to tap those retirees' experience and expertise, Sanford said.

Although diversification of the tourism-dependent economy is urged, the Grand Strand shouldn't forget about that \$4.9 billion local industry, as it will remain a vital part of the economy, said Daraius Irani, an economist at Towson University who presented statistics to summit participants.

"It is a strong economic engine of growth," he said.

Manufacturing, however, continues to take a hit as those jobs move overseas to less expensive labor markets.

Georgetown County has been the hardest hit in the area, with a 23.6 percent decline in manufacturing jobs between 1995 and 2000.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome could pose more problems for manufacturers, said Dick Averette, a summit panelist and president of Precision Southeast Inc., a plastic injection molder. Myrtle Beach-based AVX Corp. already has taken a hit because consumers in Asian markets aren't buying technical gadgets that AVX supplies parts to make.

"It can change the framework of manufacturing overnight," Averette said.

Coastal tourism leaders from both Carolinas are testing the waters of working together, sponsoring a Regional Tourism Summit in February. Proponents have identified common issues, including lobbying for later school starts, pushing for the funding of Interstate 73-74 and educating lawmakers on the \$26.4 billion economic effect tourism has in the Carolinas.

"We are going to face a lot of challenges," said Martha Hunn, chief executive of the Myrtle Beach Area Hospitality Association and a summit panelist. "This kind of work requires every one of us. We have to move forward together."

Creating a regional group to handle general planning would make it easier for Horry County Schools to pitch ideas or update the community, Superintendent Gerrita Postlewait said. "That would be vastly helpful to us."

Contact **DAWN BRYANT** at 626-0296 or [dbryant@thesunnews.com](mailto:dbryant@thesunnews.com).



Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

#### DEMOCRATS MEET AND GREET

## 9 presidential candidates, \$300,000 buoy S.C. Democrats

By LEE BANDY and AARON SHEININ  
Staff Writers

It sounded like a far cry from six months ago.

The S.C. Democratic Party -- sensing a comeback after being repudiated at the polls in November -- raised more than \$300,000 Friday night to replenish its empty campaign coffers.

The occasion was a joyous, sold-out Jefferson-Jackson Dinner attended by about 1,000 party activists.

Most of the nine Democratic presidential candidates -- in town to address the state party convention today and participate in the first televised debate tonight at USC -- worked the crowd. When they crossed paths, they shook hands and greeted each other warmly.

"Before this evening is over, you're personally going to meet the next president of the United States," outgoing state Democratic Party chairman Dick Harpootlian told the cheering throng.

State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum, a potential gubernatorial candidate in 2006, called the gathering "a family reunion," adding, "When I walked into this room tonight, I was proud to be a Democrat."

She criticized President Bush for failing to provide funding for the No Child Left Behind education program.

"We call it no behind left," she said to laughter.

Tenenbaum praised Harpootlian for his fighting spirit: "What can you say new about Dick that hasn't been written by Republicans on the walls of the bathroom?"

Friends and family went on to roast the chairman but good.

Just-defeated former Gov. Jim Hodges said, "Dick, I have a message for you: I wouldn't be where I am today without you."

U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings, D-S.C., was besieged all night with questions about his re-election plans, but he kept mum.

Hollings introduced U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., the keynote speaker.

Landrieu immediately put pressure on the 81-year-old senior senator -- asking everyone who wanted Hollings to run again to stand up. The 1,100 activists rose to their feet and cheered.

"Show him some love," she said.

Landrieu then turned to Hollings and said, "Fritz, you're going to run again."

The sentiment was echoed later that night by more than 1,000 party faithful at the annual Fish Fry hosted by U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C.

Their chant: "Run, Fritz, run!"

It was a call of affection, and maybe a little desperation.

Last year at this time, the Democrats had the governorship and held three of the state's constitutional offices. Today, they occupy two statewide offices, and are in a minority in both the House and Senate.

And there is concern Democrats could lose the U.S. Senate seat if Hollings decides not to seek re-election. If he opts for retirement, Republicans would be favored to win.

Earlier in the day, as the candidates trickled into town, most made public and private appearances in and around Columbia.

U.S. Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts addressed a Vietnam Survivors Day ceremony at Columbia's Memorial Park and talked about budget cuts at Rosewood Elementary School and how they might impact education.

At a meeting with South Carolina Combat Veterans, there was an emotional moment when Kerry, a Vietnam veteran, recognized the Rev. David Alston, who was once "my gunner" in Southeast Asia.

The senator told the story of how Alston was trapped in a gun turret above Kerry's head, manning twin .50-caliber machine guns on their boat as they traveled up the river from Vietnam.

"He is an extraordinary South Carolinian and a great patriot of our country," Kerry said.

The senator's words were drowned out by applause as Alston rose to his feet.

U.S. Rep Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., who is being courted by all nine candidates, introduced Kerry. Everyone listened carefully to see whether he might say something that could be interpreted as an endorsement.

"I endorse all nine," Clyburn told reporters.

At Clyburn's Fish Fry -- as much a must-attend event as the more-formal Jefferson-Jackson dinner -- the pep rally continued as many of the candidates mounted a small stage to address the hot-but-happy throng.

"We will be united as Democrats to kick those people out of the White House," said former U.S. Sen. Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois.

And former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, whose campaign has built a small but fervent following around the nation, made a promise the party faithful really wanted to hear:

"I'll make you proud to be a Democrat again."



Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

## President to address USC grads

**Bush plans to visit Columbia Friday, will get honorary doctorate**

By JEFF STENSLAND  
Staff Writer

President Bush will visit South Carolina Friday, one week after the nine Democrats vying for the opportunity to unseat him in 2004 hit Columbia for their first debate.

Bush is scheduled to deliver the keynote address at the University of South Carolina's commencement at 3 p.m. in the Carolina Center. He also will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree.

White House officials couldn't confirm whether Bush would make stops elsewhere in the state, and his full schedule probably won't be finalized until next week.

But the announcement he's coming to USC is major coup for the school and indicates how important South Carolina has become on the national political scene.

Friday will mark Bush's fourth visit to the Palmetto State in a year. He stumped for Sen. Lindsay Graham and Gov. Mark Sanford in their election bids.

State Democratic Party chairman Dick Harpootlian said Bush's visit speaks to the significance of South Carolina in the 2004 presidential election.

"We believe this is the beginning of the 2004 campaign," he said. "We welcome President Bush to come to South Carolina and explain how his positions are different from the positions you're going to hear this weekend (at the state Democratic convention and presidential primary debate).

Luke Byars, executive director of the S.C. Republican Party, said the president's return visit will help solidify the state as "Bush country."

Bush, whose nephew attends USC, has strong ties to South Carolina, and his win over Arizona Sen. John McCain in the 2000 South Carolina Republican primaries here proved crucial to his nomination.

USC has invited every president since John F. Kennedy to speak to its graduates. Kennedy spoke at the school in 1957 while still a U.S. senator.

USC president Andrew Sorensen credited trustee Eddie Floyd, a top fund-raiser for Bush in South Carolina, for helping to secure the visit.

Bush joins others in his inner circle who have spoken at USC commencement exercises, including chief of staff Andrew Card and political adviser Karl Rove. Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, gave the commencement speech in 1990, while he was president.

Sorensen, who, like Bush, attended Yale University, said he was "ecstatic" about Bush's visit and the prospect of raising the school's national profile.

"I spoke with (Bush chief of staff) Andy Card, and I hope (Bush) will address the issue of higher education, among other issues," he said.

A gaggle of national media representatives probably will descend on Columbia to cover Bush, who isn't known for giving many commencement addresses, and should temporarily put USC in the spotlight. S.C. ETV and S.C. Educational Radio plan to broadcast his speech.

Bush will address about 1,200 graduates from the Moore School of Business, the Arnold School of Public Health and the colleges of engineering and information technology, mass communications and information studies, nursing, pharmacy and social work.

Not everyone is thrilled about Bush's speech, and some students and faculty members plan to protest the visit.

"He's not an example USC students should aspire to," said Amanda Martin, a graduate student in USC's Arnold School of Public Health and School of Social Work. "Letting him come here and invade our commencement should not be allowed."

Martin said she's boycotting her ceremony and "wouldn't be caught in the same building as George W. Bush."

Sorensen, who met with students concerned about Bush's speech this week, said other speakers at USC's other commencement ceremonies hold a "wide variety of political views."

Jack Valenti, CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America, will deliver USC's commencement address Saturday for the colleges of hospitality, retail and sports management; education; liberal arts; science and mathematics; the Honors College; and the schools of environment and music.

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*Staff writers Valerie Bauerlein and Aaron Sheinin contributed to this article.*



Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

## Ports Authority probes loan request

By JOE GUY COLLIER  
Staff Writer

The S.C. State Ports Authority placed a manager on leave while investigating whether he sought a loan from a Charleston executive whose firm was under contract with the state agency.

The State newspaper on Friday obtained a copy of a 2001 e-mail sent from that midlevel manager to Warren Lasch, managing director of Charleston International Ports LLC.

In 1999, Charleston International signed a 30-year lease with the Ports Authority to operate a cargo terminal on the former Charleston Naval Base.

The Ports Authority terminated its agreement with Charleston International in April, saying an audit showed the company did not receive required approval for some transactions and used company funds for Lasch's benefit.

Charleston International denies wrongdoing and said it wouldn't leave the dock even after the Ports Authority told it to. The two sides have since been involved in a legal battle over the terminal.

In the 2001 e-mail, the Ports Authority employee introduced himself to Charleston International and then asked Lasch for a loan.

"Now on the personal side, I was wondering if you would entertain a loan to me in the amount of \$150,000-\$175,000," the employee wrote.

The Ports Authority would not comment on the specifics of the e-mail or whether it was sent by the employee.

In a statement, the agency said it first learned of the possibility of the e-mail Friday. The employee was placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

"If it is as it appears, this e-mail raises extremely serious questions about ethical conduct," the Ports Authority said in the statement. "We regard any lapse from high ethical standards by employees or vendors as completely reprehensible and unacceptable."

The State was unable to contact the employee listed as the sender in the e-mail.

Ric Tapp, a Charleston lawyer representing Lasch, confirmed Lasch received the e-mail. After the e-mail was received, Tapp said he called the Ports Authority employee at the request of Lasch.

"I contacted (him) and told him this was not something Mr. Lasch could consider," Tapp said.

No money changed hands, and no complaints were filed, Tapp said.

Lasch declined to comment on the e-mail. Richard Quinn Sr., who is handling public relations for Charleston International, said the company has no plans to take action on the matter.

"It was inappropriate," Quinn said. "It was awkward. But Mr. Lasch wanted to get along."

The e-mail does not appear to violate ethics laws for state employees, said Cathy Hazelwood, general counsel for the S.C. State Ethics Commission.

From the e-mail alone, the employee does not appear to be committing bribery, requesting money in return for something else, she said.

Since the loan was not issued, the employee also failed to gain any benefit from his position, Hazelwood said.

"On the face of it, it looks bad, but it doesn't look like a violation," Hazelwood said.

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*Reach Collier at (803) 771-8307 or [jcollier@thestate.com](mailto:jcollier@thestate.com).*

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Story last updated at 7:11 a.m. Saturday, May 3, 2003

## Furl the flag remarks

Congressman Jim Clyburn correctly views the issue of the Confederate flag as one that diverts attention from the larger issues facing the nation and from the Democratic candidates who are seeking nomination to its highest office. The presidential candidates would do better to focus their attention on matters of national interest during tonight's national debate in Columbia.

Most of them have already expressed their position on the flag, in response to the national media covering the run-up to the state's early primary. We don't recall a candidate who has yet taken position that acknowledges that the presence and location of the Confederate flag is a state matter, and that its removal from the Statehouse to a Confederate monument was the subject of a long-debated legislative compromise.

The issue has been kept alive primarily by the NAACP, although the legislative compromise met the organization's original desire to have the flag removed from the Statehouse.

Following that agreement, the NAACP declared an economic boycott against South Carolina -- a boycott that Rep. Clyburn has opposed.

Rep. Clyburn, the state's first black congressman since the 19th century, argues that bringing the Confederate flag into the debate will emphasize anti-South Carolina stereotypes at the expense of issues including health care and education. Unfortunately, members of the media have encouraged those stereotypes by focusing on the flag without any apparent recognition of the background of the issue.

Leading questions about the flag may resurface again tonight during the debate, but candidates have been well advised to give the issue short shrift.

  
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## Teachers, too, feel PACT pressure

Posted Saturday, May 3, 2003 - 11:52 pm

By Cindy Landrum  
EDUCATION WRITER  
[clandrum@greenvillenews.com](mailto:clandrum@greenvillenews.com)

Like her students, Maria Neely will have her first encounter with South Carolina's Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test on Monday.

[e-mail this story](#)

And like her students, the third-grade teacher at Tigerville Elementary in Greenville County is feeling the pressure.

"I'm just trying to stay calm and doing a lot of praying," she said. "I don't want my kids to be scared because they think I'm scared."

On Monday, about 300,000 students across South Carolina will pick up their No. 2 pencils and take the PACT.

They're not the only ones who are judged by how they do on the test.

Teachers are judged on how their students perform.

Elementary and middle schools' report cards are based solely on the results.

"The teachers worry," said Regina Urueta, principal at Tigerville. "They feel the pressure."

And as the stakes increase, so do the number of teachers coming under investigation for test security breaches. One teacher in Columbia was arrested on a charge of violating test security earlier this year, the first since the late 1980s, according to state education officials.

State law prohibits violations of the state Board of Education's test security guidelines. Violations include reviewing or discussing any test questions with students or other school personnel before, during or after testing.

Violation of PACT security is a misdemeanor that carries a maximum penalty of \$1,000 in fines and 90 days in jail.

Years ago, before PACT, there were about six test security violation investigations a year, said state Department of Education spokesman Jim Foster. Last year, there were twice as many.

South Carolina is not the only state facing the problem. Several high-profile cases have occurred in recent years and Georgia canceled its spring testing this year after

questions were posted on the Internet. Some school districts, like Pickens County, are having teachers sign a paper saying they're aware of test regulations and that they will abide by them.

The Department of Education is moving toward that for all teachers, Foster said.

At Tigerville, the guidance counselor conducts a workshop with teachers about what they can and cannot do before every state and standardized test is given, Urueta said.

On test days, monitors are in each classroom where the test is being given, she said.

Urueta said the Tigerville faculty tries not to focus on the PACT test all year.

But, even so, Neely said she wonders at times whether she's done everything she could to get her students ready for the test, which will run through May 16.

"I think both the kids and I will be glad when it's over," she said.

*Cindy Landrum covers education and can be reached at 298-4303.*



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**Kim Lee - Saturday**

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Monday

## Senate mulls ending property tax for 2-cent sales tax hike

Posted Thursday, May 1, 2003 - 8:22 pm

By James T. Hammond  
 CAPITAL BUREAU  
 COLUMBIA — Senate Republican leaders are considering a tax swap to end property taxes on homes and cars, increase sales taxes by 2 cents, and raise as much as \$200 million in additional funds for education.

Nothing is set in stone, Senate leaders said.

But in a GOP caucus meeting Thursday afternoon, they sought an alternative to a failed Senate Finance Committee plan. The senators tentatively settled on a broad outline promoted among senators for the past week by Sen. David Thomas, R-Fountain Inn.

In a letter to Thomas, state economist William C. Gillespie estimated a 2-cent increase in sales taxes would raise \$1.05 billion in a year. To eliminate the tax on personal vehicles and owner-occupied homes would require \$1.02 billion, Gillespie estimated.

"This may be our only chance in our lifetime to totally eliminate property taxes on our homes and cars," said Sen. Verne Smith, R-Greer.

There is substantial resistance in the Legislature against giving the schools any more money. But there is also much eagerness to eliminate property taxes on homes and personal vehicles, and that may be the carrot necessary to win support of the tax-swap plan.

Opinion polls have shown again and again that voters like the idea of swapping higher sales taxes for elimination of the property tax. But there is also a downside to such a swap. For example, a home-owner would lose the deduction of his or her property taxes on the federal income tax return, whereas there is no federal deduction for sales taxes paid.

A straight swap would not produce the increased revenue that Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, has vowed to produce.

But Thomas said one strategy being discussed would have the sales tax increase on July 1, and distributions to begin Jan. 1, 2004. That would produce an estimated \$500 million in one-time revenue that would shore up education spending for at least the next two years.

The Senate Finance Committee's goal had been to set per-pupil spending at \$1,904, or \$261 higher than the House-passed budget's figure of \$1,643 per student. The House spending plan reduces the base student cost to levels not seen since 1994, and could result in the firing of 6,000 teachers according to State Department of Education estimates.

Senate leaders said Thursday they now hope to increase per-student spending to \$1,943, or \$300 above the House figure.

Leatherman acknowledged in an afternoon press conference with about a dozen senators that the Finance Committee plan to remove sales tax exemptions on car sales and manufacturing equipment will not pass the Senate.

Those measures had been strongly opposed by car dealers and manufacturers. Leatherman said, "if allowed to stand (those taxes) could have an adverse affect on our state's already struggling economy as well as economic development."

Technically, the Legislature cannot eliminate all property taxes. Thomas said the cities, counties and school districts are allowed by the state Constitution to levy property taxes to repay debt, such as bonds that pay for school construction. Only a referendum by the voters could change the Constitution.

But the legislators can eliminate by statute the taxes currently levied for operations of schools and local government.



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## High Court ruling on utility points to lawmakers' folly

### ***'Practical solution' is constitutionally flawed***

Published Friday, May 2nd, 2003

The state Supreme Court's ruling in a lawsuit against the Hilton Head No. 1 Public Service District highlights once again how state lawmakers' failure to adhere to the state constitution can lead to a mess down the road.

The state's high court ruled Monday that a group of Hilton Head Island property owners could not look to the U.S. Constitution for protection against taxation without representation. The federal constitution, the court said, doesn't offer such a guarantee.

The public service district's commission, as well as the commissions for the South Island and Broad Creek public service districts, are appointed, not elected. (Broad Creek does hold an advisory referendum.) But under the laws that created them decades ago, they can levy some taxes.

The state constitution does offer South Carolina citizens protection against "no taxation without representation," and the Supreme Court said as much in a 1997 decision dealing with special purpose districts. But the court also recognized the practical issues associated with its decision and gave lawmakers until December 1999 to fix the problem.

The lawmakers' solution was a practical one, but one that doesn't meet the constitutional test.

The law outlines the procedures for deciding whether to elect such commissions. But for commissions that remain appointed, property tax rates are frozen and the decision to raise or lower those taxes is left up to elected county councils.

That's not a solution. Nearly every year we see the problems such an arrangement can cause with the Beaufort County School District's annual budget -- a lot of finger pointing and still no clear accountability for decisions made.

Public service district commissions should be elected or the taxing authority eliminated.

Where does that leave the group of mostly native islanders who sued Hilton Head No. 1 in 1998? Apparently at the end of their legal rope. Their attorney said Monday after the Supreme Court's decision was announced, "It's probably the end of the line."

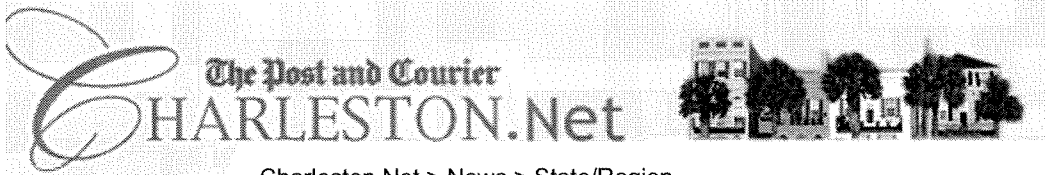
The group had filed separate state and federal lawsuits against the utility in 1998, trying to recover four years of taxes and fees they said were unfairly collected in the late 1990s from property owners in the north-island public service district. The federal and state actions were later combined and sent back to state court. The lawsuits were filed after it was revealed the district had improperly charged some property owners availability fees for water and sewer service, leading to \$120,000 in refunds to customers.

Any sense of justice in this tortuous legal process is way out of balance. And state lawmakers and their inattention to the guiding document they promise to uphold is to blame.

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Story last updated at 7:08 a.m. Saturday, May 3, 2003

## Prepaid tuition program takes economic hit

With markets weak, tuition increases outstrip fund's return on its investments

Associated Press

COLUMBIA--The sluggish economy and rising college costs could threaten South Carolina's tuition prepayment program, analysts say.

The program allows individuals to buy education contracts at today's prices and use them for future tuition costs.

The state takes money paid in and invests it so that returns cover future tuition costs. But the fund managed by the state treasurer's office had a shortfall of \$11,014,364 as of Feb. 28, according to reports available this week. The gap is the result of higher tuition and lower investment returns.

Tuition costs rose an average of 20 percent last year, compared with a projected rise of 7 percent. Meanwhile, investments earned 4.9 percent, 3.1 percent less than what the program had projected.

"It's important to remember despite the deficit that there's no negative cash flow," said Trav Robertson, spokesman for the state treasurer's office. "We're taking in more money than we're paying out."

The treasurer's office could not say whether it planned to shift its investment strategy. The program currently invests a majority of funds in fixed-income securities.

"Being under-funded is a concern, but it's not a mortal concern

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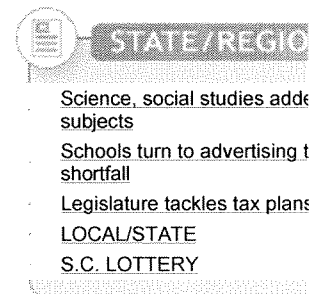
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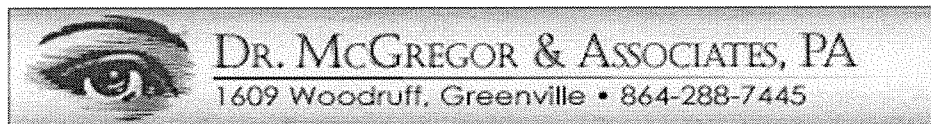
because the program is still fairly young and there's an opportunity to grow out of this problem," said Bob Crompton, vice president of Actuarial Resources Corp. of Alpharetta, Ga., which handled the analysis.

Tuition is projected to increase 8.5 percent and investments grow 6.8 percent in the coming year, according to the report.

West Virginia stopped accepting new accounts into its tuition prepayment program in March. Its five-year-old plan is underfunded by \$16 million. Mississippi's program reported a \$35.6 million projected shortfall, while Ohio's program has a projected market value deficit of nearly \$47 million.



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## Southern Connector paves way for other road projects

Posted Saturday, May 3, 2003 - 10:05 pm

By Bill Carpenter

As the Southern Connector moves full steam ahead into its third year of service to the Upstate of South Carolina, I am filled with a sense of pride. Not only does the roadway relieve traffic congestion on Interstates 85 and 385, but also it enabled other Upstate roadways to be built and paved the way for a unique method of financing South Carolina road projects — the public-private partnership.


As a founding member of the Connector 2000 Association board of directors (the body that oversees the Southern Connector), I feel privileged to have seen the project come full circle. It was more than 30 years ago when the Connector was just a dream of county planners.


In February 2001, the dream was realized when the 16-mile toll road opened to the public under budget and ahead of schedule. Although the traffic counts are currently under initial projections, the numbers are steadily growing (more than 7.2 million transactions) and the future is bright for the innovative roadway.

The Connector not only relieves traffic congestion on Interstates 85 and 385, but it opens up a significant portion of southern Greenville County to economic development. Still, there is another benefit of the Southern Connector — it enabled other state highway projects to be funded.

Originally the Southern Connector was one of five major road projects the South Carolina Department of Transportation wanted to build but lacked the necessary funding for. However, due to a creative financing method, the developers of the Southern Connector funded the roadway through a unique public-private partnership. This allowed the road to be constructed without the use of taxpayer, state or federal highway funds. In addition, the state would own the road and the majority of the financial burden would fall on the bondholders rather than on the local community.

Later, the State Infrastructure Bank designated the Southern Connector as a "local

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### Guest column

- **Bill Carpenter:** Southern Connector paves way for other road projects (05/03/03)
- **Eric Thompson and Jill Johnson:** South Carolina needs a new energy future (05/02/03)
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- **John Warner:** Tapping University center's resources will pay off (04/29/03)
- **Political debate turning impolitic in American society** (04/28/03)

### More details

W.L. "Bill" Carpenter of Greenville is the retired chairman of RUST Environmental Infrastructure Inc. He also is a member of the Connector 2000 Association board of directors.

match," which means the Upstate received an estimated \$350 million to finance other area highway projects, including the widening of I-385, the Verne Smith Parkway and the Western Corridor, without raising local taxes. Depending on the match required, Greenville County would have had to pay a minimum of \$20 million up to a possible \$175 million in local match funds if the Connector did not exist.

Would these projects have been funded eventually? Yes, of course they would have. They are worthwhile, needed highway projects. But it would have taken years to secure the funds through allotted federal guide share funds. Now, each of these projects are either already completed or under way, all because of the local "match" generated by Southern Connector toll revenues.

The Southern Connector was the first road project of its kind to be funded through a public-private partnership in South Carolina. Since that time the financing model has proven successful in other parts of the state — including in Horry County. The Carolina Bays Parkway is a \$232 million road project that was funded through a partnership between Horry County, the State Infrastructure Bank and the South Carolina Department of Transportation. Horry County citizens saw a need for highway improvements in their area and passed a 1.5 percent hospitality tax. The monies generated by the tax are collected monthly, offering an income stream to match with state funds.

Sometimes new innovations take some time to catch on. The Southern Connector is a unique, worthwhile innovation that benefits the citizens of the Upstate and the entire state of South Carolina. Not only has the Connector enabled other Upstate roadways to be built, but its financing model has enabled road projects across the state to become a reality.

I am certain of one thing — the Southern Connector has already proven to be a success. And as the economy turns around and economic development increases, the number of drivers on the roadway will skyrocket.



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## U.S. 278 widening delayed

**BY ASHLEY FLETCHER, *The Island Packet***

Other stories by Ashley Fletcher

Published Saturday, May 3rd, 2003

Work to widen a one-mile section of U.S. 278 won't begin until after Labor Day, Beaufort County officials said Friday.

The S.C. Department of Transportation has ended a contract with APAC of Georgia to widen the highway from the bridges to Hilton Head Island to Hilton Head Factory Stores 2, according to a county news release sent out Friday.

The contract was dropped because of "unanticipated conflicts with utility lines," the release said.

Transportation Department officials, who were not available for comment, said in March that after the contract was awarded in January, engineers found a 30-inch water main in the way of the project's drainage system. The department was given the incorrect location of the main, officials said.

County Council Chairman Weston Newton said Transportation Department officials told him the plans could be redesigned to accommodate the main.

Work was supposed to begin in February, with a temporary break during the MCI Heritage golf tournament, which ran April 14-20. The contract included a penalty of \$2,500 for each day the work exceeded the May 17 deadline, if the reason for delay was within the contractor's control.

But last month, officials said the contractor had decided not to begin work until after the Heritage.

Now, the Transportation Department will combine the one-mile widening project with a 3.5-mile widening project that was planned separately. The two will be bid as one project. The second stretch runs from Factory Stores 2 to Simmonsville Road.

The county has \$12 million for improvements to U.S. 278. The contract for the project was for \$2.74 million.

Contact Ashley Fletcher at 706-8144 or [afletcher@islandpacket.com](mailto:afletcher@islandpacket.com).

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Posted on Sat, May. 03, 2003

## Forests falling in S.C.

State has lost 2 percent of its woodlands since '93, report says

By SAMMY FRETWELL  
Staff Writer

South Carolina has less forested land today than a decade ago, and experts blame sprawling development for the loss of trees.

From 1993 to 2001, the state lost more than 230,000 acres of timberland, or about 2 percent of South Carolina's more than 12 million acres of trees, according to statistics released this week by the S.C. Forestry Commission.

The losses are more than the combined acreage of Columbia and Greenville, the Congaree Swamp National Monument and all of South Carolina's state parks.

Most of the forest declines occurred in urban areas, such as Greenville, Columbia, Hilton Head Island and Myrtle Beach, where booming growth is changing the once rural landscape, Forestry Commission officials said.

Losing woodlands to urban development kills or drives away wildlife, while degrading the natural beauty of South Carolina, said environmentalists and government biologists who track forest losses.

"It's a real reason to be concerned," said Dell Isham, director of the S.C. Sierra Club. "As you reduce forest land, you reduce wildlife habitat. It's one of the consequences of urban sprawl."

State forestry officials said South Carolina still has plenty of tree cover: More than 64 percent of the state's 19 million acres are forested. The percentage of forests in South Carolina is about the same as in Georgia and North Carolina.

"We'll probably continue to see a decline (in forests) as the urban population grows, and South Carolina becomes more of an attractive place for people to retire -- especially on the coast and the I-85 corridor near Greenville, " commission forester Mike Bozzo said.

South Carolina's population grew by 15 percent from 1990 to 2000, according to the Census.

Despite the woodlands losses, state Forestry Association executive Bob Scott said the change isn't dramatic and must be kept in perspective.

South Carolina has more land covered in trees today than it did during parts of the early 20th century, when much of the countryside was cut for crop farming, said Scott, whose association represents the timber industry. Many of today's forests stand on land that once had been cleared for farming.

In 1936, for instance, the state had 10.7 million acres of woodlands. Today, it has about 12.2 million acres of timberland, the Forestry Commission said. In 1993, the state had nearly 12.5 million acres of timberland.

"It's nothing to be alarmed about," Scott said of the latest losses.

The statistics, released this week through the Forestry Commission, update preliminary state figures from 16 months ago showing a loss of woodlands in South Carolina since 1993.

South Carolina's latest numbers reflect recent trends in parts of the Southeast, where urban growth and the rise of the timber industry have reduced forests or converted natural woodlands into industrial pine plantations.

A November 2001 U.S. Forest Service report said urban sprawl is the greatest threat to Southeastern woodlands during the next 40 years. The South is expected to lose millions of acres of forested land to development by 2040, the Southern Forest Resource Assessment said.

The federal report also projected hardwood forest losses and the continued rise of fast-growing industrial pine tree farms in some areas.

A similar trend was noted in the new Forestry Commission figures .

From 1993 to 2001, the acreage of pine tree farms rose from 2.6 million to 3.1 million, the commission reported. Pine plantations make up about 25 percent of the state's forested land.

During that same period, nearly 700,000 acres of natural, hardwood-dominated forests were either converted to other types of woodlands or lost to development, the Forestry Commission's Tim Adams said.

Scott, of the Forestry Association, said the changes are minor fluctuations in the types of forest cover. Recent shifts in the types of forested land "are so small, they don't represent a trend," Scott said.

But Lee Barclay, a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service official who worked on the 2001 federal inventory of Southern forests, said South Carolina's latest statistics are worth noting.

Converting natural, hardwood-dominated forests to pine plantations makes it hard for some animals to survive, he said.

"The wildlife diversity in the hardwood forest is greater than you see in pure pine forests," Barclay said.

Planting thick rows of pine trees cuts sunlight on the forest floor, which kills plants that shelter and feed some animals, Fish and Wildlife Service scientist Phil DeGarmo said. Among those are some types of amphibians, reptiles and migratory birds, DeGarmo said.

DeGarmo said animals will eventually move into pine plantations when some of the trees are cut and sunlight helps regenerate underbrush. But that can take three decades or more, he said.

DeGarmo, who works for the service's Charleston office, said the outright loss of forests to urban development also hurts wildlife.

Not only does it drive away animals that lived in areas that are developed, but clearing trees in some areas fragments the remaining overall forest. Some animals, such as the rare red-cockaded woodpecker, need big swaths of forest to survive, rather than small islands of woodlands, he said.

"But it affects all species," DeGarmo said.

**Kim Lee - Saturday**

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**Communities****Entertainment****Classifieds****Coupons****Real estate****Jobs****Cars****Custom****Publications****Help****Debate on MLK holiday bill delayed until May 30**

Posted Friday, May 2, 2003 - 7:18 pm

By Jason Zacher  
 STAFF WRITER  
[jzacher@greenvillenews.com](mailto:jzacher@greenvillenews.com)

Debate on a bill that would force all South Carolina counties to observe a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday has been adjourned for a month.

e-mail this story

"I guess some of the others (representatives) wanted to test their constituents," said Greenville Rep. Fletcher Smith, who co-authored the bill. "I don't think it needs to be postponed, but if it will give Greenville County a chance to come to terms with the issue, I don't have a problem with that."

Rep. Bob Leach, R-Greenville, asked for the debate to be delayed. He could not be reached for comment.

The bill was approved by the House Judiciary Committee last week. It was introduced in January, after the Greenville County Council initially refused to establish a holiday honoring the slain civil rights leader.

The County Council's Republican majority rejected the holiday request for a final time April 15, and the issue can't be brought up again for a year. The Council voted to include a King holiday on a list of holidays on which county employees would vote each year.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, a Greenville native, has called for a national economic boycott of the county although most of its municipalities observe the day. A march is scheduled for May 17 that will include Jackson and national NAACP President Kweisi Mfume.

Supporters of the holiday in Greenville County see the bill as the last gasp for a holiday here, but few hold any hope it could pass the Senate.

The debate will start only three weeks before the end of the legislative term. If it doesn't get to the Senate this year, it will go to the Senate in January — right before the anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

"I don't think anybody will want to vote against it in an election year," Smith said. "That means 2004 might be the year we get it."

Thus far, the legislative debate has focused on whether the General Assembly can impose an unfunded mandate on local governments and on eroding home rule versus the state's overall well-being.

Under the bill, South Carolina's 46 counties would be required to observe all 12 of the state's paid holidays. Those include Martin Luther King's Birthday and Confederate Memorial Day. Failure to comply could result in the state withholding state aid to local governments. For Greenville, that totals about \$17 million a year.

Only three counties do not recognize the third Monday in January as a formal King holiday: Greenville, Saluda and Lexington.

*Jason Zacher covers Greenville County and can be reached at 298-4272.*



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